DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 271 144 JC 860 350

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TITLE A Performance Standard for Community College Counseling: Institutional Goal Attainment.
PUB DATE Feb 86
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at a Regional Symposium of the National Council on Student Development (Orlando, FL, February 6-8, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; *Counseling Effectiveness; *Counseling Objectives; *Counseling Services; Counselor Role; *Educational Counseling; *Evaluation Criteria; *Organizational Objectives; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

Various perspectives on the current state and future of community college counseling are examined in this paper. First, four commonly practiced approaches to counseling are described: (1) the integrated perspective, which views counseling as a form of teaching which is an integral part of educational programs of the community college; (2) the ancillary perspective, which sees counseling as a luxury whose role in the educational process is unclear and possibly unnecessary; (3) the comparative worth perspective, which perceives the contribution of counseling as smaller than that of other aspects of community college education, considering it a weak link in the educational process that needs a new vision about its central purpose; and (4) the organizational effectiveness perspective, which sees counseling as a unit of an organization with its own specialized tasks and objectives. After estimating the future of community college counseling from each of these perspectives, the paper proposes an alternative model for counseling services of the future based on the evaluation of these services in terms of their contribution to the achievement of the goals of the college. Drawing from organizational effectiveness literature, "domains of effectiveness" are identified as related to the achievement of organizational goals, environmental conditions are translated into indicators of effectiveness, and performance standards for the counseling unit are suggested. The final sections point to institutional contexts which are more suitable than others for the application of the organizationally oriented performance standards for counseling, and call for dialog on the proposal. (EJV)

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A Performance Standard for Community College Counseling: Institutional Goal Attainment

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JC 860 350

Prepared for the National Council on Student Development regional symposium on Community College Counseling Futures, Orlando, Florida, February 6 - 8, 1986.

Perspectives on the Current State of Community College Counseling

There is no unanimity among community college educators regarding the current state of counseling, nor is there agreement on its future. By current state, I mean worth to the overall enterprise. There simply is no clear view by all even of the most basic purpose of counseling, for there is no agreement on the role of counseling in the educational development of students. It follows, unsurprisingly, that there is no common view of the future of counseling given no consent on the essential qualities of the educational activity.

The result of this condition, of course, is that there are many views of community college counseling. Whether the views are of equal value to community college education may depend on the beholder, but most of them can be classified into four perspectives. Actually, there is a fifth perspective which will not be discussed here: Community college counseling is useless and should be eliminated. Those who hold this view are scattered throughout the community college enterprise and appear to hold their view unsystematically across professional subpopulations. The four perspectives which do command faithful attachment by community college educators are described briefly as follows:

The Integrated Perspective. Counseling is an integral aspect of educational programs of the community college. It is a form of teaching and its aims overlap conspicuously the aims of other teaching activities. Counseling also is guidance of

students, on a more personalized basis than is possible in some classroom delivery systems, and the function has an honorable and visible history in the community college movement. The need of students for guidance toward educational and life goals was among the most frequently--and I suspect most passionately--recognized need of community college students by founding leaders of the colleges in the first quarter of the 20th century. Community leaders, who necessarily had to support the formation of a new college, were assured with absolute conviction that students who attended the new college would be accorded special attention in selecting an appropriate area of study and in either moving on to other colleges or moving into the labor market. These early leaders, usually presidents, of course, were articulating the central theme that counseling and other forms of educational program are integrally related, necessary to the community (or junior) college enterprise, and guaranteed to all to enroll.

This view of counseling is popular today by many community college educators. Its proponents may be overrepresented by professionals in the field of student personnel, but I suspect many other administrators and teachers fundamentally feel that counseling is woven into the fabric of American higher education and that it should remain so.

The Ancillary Perspective. Counseling is a luxury in higher education, according to this view. It is a luxury for students who, if denied the service, would discover for themselves the

intended end product of personal counseling. An adult attending college, for example, should be able to gather information about the educational programs offered and reach a decision about career without professional assistance. Counseling is a luxury from an institutional resource perspective also. The main job of education is to teach and that is accomplished by persons competent either in a discipline or in a skill or vocation and who can transmit their knowledge to students. The role of counseling in this process is unknown and possibly unnecessary. At least, according to these proponents, the service could be offered only to those who need it most and who are willing to pay for it.

The ancillary perspective also focuses on the unfortunate reality that counseling never has offered a clear, concise, and unanimous view of its essential nature to educational leaders. It is thought to be several things in the educational process--each of value, perhaps, but valued according to varied opinions. It is the promoter of affective development; it is the facilitator of psychosocial change; it is arranger of environments for learning; it is the interpreter of complex bureaucratic processes; it is the advisor for the choice makers, it is the supporter of the oppressed; it is, in short, whatever change agent is needed to help students achieve their goals. An argument might be mounted that counseling is all these things, but an unfriendly critic may observe without convincing

opposition that a single unit of an organization cannot be all these things in any meaningful sense or at least stands little chance of accomplishing them well. If the service were offered apart from the college, clients could choose the type of service among the wide array of possibilities.

Advocates of this perspective today point to weak leadership in counseling. No one even seems to know where to lead, and, if apparently known, seems able to chart the course. Advocates claim poor quality of service under the present delivery system and/or no evidence of effectiveness within the system regardless of the purported essence of the activity. Counseling rightfully is under study by administrative surgeons, according to this perspective, who can choose to operate on, treat, or rehabilitate the function as one option or let it die from the internal diseases just described as another option.

The Comparative Worth Perspective. Counseling makes a contribution, no doubt about that, but the trouble is that it makes a smaller contribution than do other aspects of community college education, so say those who prefer this perspective on counseling. Those who consent to this view argue simply that counseling is the weak link in the community college education chain. While some adherents might cut out the weak link and use the strong links which remain as the totality of the enterprise, most take a position that the counseling link needs to be reconstituted in a more suitable form for the contemporary

community college and that professional counselors need to initiate their own renaissance.

In this view, counseling mostly needs a new vision about its central purpose. A new concept could serve to guide the renaissance and the function could be restored to earlier days of glory, like it was in the late 1960s or early 1970s, for example. Like the integrated perspective, this view is popular today among certain segments of community college education, especially those in the student personnel field, but, in fairness, is held by many institutional leaders such as presidents. Presidents, for example, are likely to take a balanced view about what is needed to serve students and the institution and argue that all professional educators potentially have an important role to play. They wish to focus all resources on goal achievement in a manner most likely to yield desired results. Counseling, then, is seen as valuable. It should not be discarded lightly, reflecting the admonition, "Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater!"

The Organizational Effectiveness Perspective. Counseling is seen as a unit of an organization, with specialized tasks and objectives, encumbered by the goals of the total college. The emphasis and primary theme of this perspective is that the counseling unit properly is enslaved by the organizational master. Counseling, like other units of the organization, serves at least two masters--the organization itself and the clients who

seek to benefit from the activities of the organization. It is proper in the minds of those who adhere to this perspective, that counseling services and activities be judged (that is, that a determination of worth be made) based on the extent to which they make a discernible contribution to the attainment of the goals of the organization.

While there is no inherent reason for conflict between "helping students achieve their goals" and "helping the organization achieve its goals," there are some practical impediments to harmony in the duel assignments. The interest among counselors in working with people overrides the interest in working with abstractions, for example. Counselors chose their work "to help people." They were schooled in people-helping approaches. They are rewarded intrinsically for people-to-people contact. They describe their accomplishments in terms consistent with personal changes in others. Conversely, they do not understand "the organization." Having no preparation even to understand the nature of organizational dynamics, counselors are reserved in their initiatives to promote institutional causes. It follows that without schooling and without experience, counselors and, by extension, the units they represent, may be engulfed by a myopic naivete about their reasons for being other than existing to serve student-clients.

Miller and Prince (1976) discussed this same issue regarding counselors' views of "management" and argued that counselors "... know little about techniques for altering the academic environment" (p. 108). They also pointed to counselor reluctance to involve themselves in strategic efforts to modify the surroundings of students, preferring instead to change the student if necessary.

This perspective is closely aligned with the comparative worth perspective, yet distinctive from it. The comparative worth perspective calls for a contribution to the overall college effort, but the call is to accomplish the traditional objectives of service to students more adequately than is evident now. The organizational effectiveness perspective seeks the contribution to the overall college effort, but may ask that it be made in nontraditional ways which go beyond direct service to students only.

Alternative Futures

It is possible, and perhaps useful, to make enlightened estimates of the future of community college counseling from each of these perspectives. If the integrity of the central themes of the perspectives was preserved in the scenarios, I suspect the futures would be discernibly different from one another.

Counseling services, programs, and activities, for example, might:

> be so woven into the fabric of the educational programs that each professional assumed specific counseling responsibilities along with specific teaching responsibilities;
>
> be contracted from private organizations to deliver specific services to students on call and for fees;
>
> be a center for student development accountable for specific and measurable gains in student intellectual and psychosocial growth as a result of intentional interventions at both a personal and group level programmed for systematic, dependable delivery to all student subpopulations; or
>
> be a technological resource for the institution charged to generate valid data on students and the environment, provide systems of access to the data usable by all constituent groups, assist both students and curriculum developers in educational planning which optimizes resources vis a vis market needs, monitors student progress toward goals and assists to modify environments if indicated, and delivers specific services efficiently as directed by institutional leaders.

Each of these scenarios, of course, represents a logical extension of the four perspectives. Is one better than the other? Are all equally possible? Will the fifth--and undiscussed--scenario win over all the others?

Counseling for Institutional Performance

Perhaps the alternative future of counseling for a specific college should depend on local contingencies. I can live with that so long as all the relevant contingencies indeed are considered and conscious decisions are made based on reality and

vision. It is more difficult to live with nondecisions by educational leaders. Their hand-wringing, woe-is-me-who-has-to-suffer-the-plight-of-inadequate-counseling attitude is tiring and tells us as much about the hand-wringer as it does about counseling.

I believe that each of the scenarios briefly sketched above is possible. Knowledge, leadership, and competence properly applied to the situation can result an improved future for community college counseling. A prerequisite to such application, however, is vision. We are far more likely to end up where we wish to be if we know the destination prior to launching the trip.

Let me describe the destination I prefer (or at least the one I believe needs the most analysis to understand). The destination I prefer may not enjoy your support for I suspect that many of you, given time to analyze my proposal, will decide that it will not work. I do not wish simply to be provocative, though the occasion which brings us together might warrant such a motive; rather, I wish to be analytical. I tried to be introspective about my preference, for I have served as a counselor and have utmost respect for the need for the service and the potential for help it harbors. I supervised a large counseling operation in a community college for many years and, I assure you, my involvement was more than managerial. I have studied our literature including our theories, our research

findings, and our experienced-based comment. I have taught graduate students off and on for over twenty years and we have considered jointly how to improve counseling. I have served well over fifty colleges as a consultant and often our concerns in those assignments centered on the quality of counseling services. Whether this preparation for stating my preference for an alternative future for community college counseling actually qualifies me to offer advice is debatable. You will judge that.

I believe that counseling services of the future should be judged by an organizational standard: Effectiveness of counseling depends on institutional goal achievement. Goal achievement is the primary indicator of organizational health; that is, the quality of the organization is judged by its ability to achieve its goals. Units of the organization, therefore, should be judged in the perspective of their contribution to this ability. Consider the analogy of manual versus power-assisted steering system options in relation to the overall performance of a car to visualize the relationship of unit to organization performance criteria. It matters whether the steering is power-assisted, but the car can be steered by either system or even if a power-assisted system malfunctions. Should we judge the steering system by its intrinsic value or by its contribution to the overall performance of the car? Both approaches have utility, but the later is a more important standard. It certainly matters, for example, that students receive assistance

when they experience difficulty in learning and, admittedly, such a condition has both individual and organizational implications. For the larger good to the community and to the society, however, it matters more whether the organization succeeds than whether some clients rake maximum advantage of their educational opportunities.

Counseling normally is organized as a separate unit of the college. It is staffed by professionals and is guided by administrative policy and leadership. The activities of professional staff are determined by the prevailing view of the primary reason for existing within the organization. According to the organizational effectiveness perspective, the prevailing view should be that counseling services exist in the organization to enable the achievement of institutional goals. Like the steering system options in a car, the form and substance of counseling activities are important, but the contribution to the larger system is more important.

Let us face the counter argument squarely and set it aside for the moment. A competing reason for existing as an organizational unit, some may argue, is to assist students achieve their goals. In this view, the activities of the professionals are geared for direct service delivery to the clients. It is an honorable view and that a need for direct service to clients exists is undeniable. The trouble is it will not work as a standard of performance (that is, it will not

result in an improved future for community college counseling). The needs are too diverse; the resources for meeting them are too scarce; the standards of quality of service are too varied; the judgments of value to human development are too uncertain. An institutional perspective on the reasons for existing, on the other hand, do not exclude direct service, only that they be judged by organizational, rather than client, needs.

To be held accountable against institutional goal achievement standards means, of course, that the organizational goals must be clear. Here is the first hurdle to the organizational effectiveness perspective as an alternative future for community college counseling. Many organizational goals are not clear, certainly are not specific, and translate into the direction articulated by the institution's chief executive officer.

Take, for example, the lack of clarity in overall mission as seen from a national level. It is called mission ambiguity by some (See, for example, Breneman & Nelson, 1981; Cross, 1981; Gleazer, 1980; and Richardson & Leslie, 1980) and is aptly set in context as a problem for the future of community colleges by Cross (1985). Writing with colleagues about the evolving "fifth generation" of the community college movement (Deegan & Tillery, 1985), she discussed five possible foci for community college education, each with its proponents and visibility in practice:

> the comprehensive focus (a view of mission which roughly parallels the five traditional programs of community colleges--career education, compensatory education, community education, collegiate education, and general education);
>
> the vertical focus (a view of mission equated to emphasizing the transfer function of the comprehensive focus);
>
> the horizontal focus (a view of mission that suggests that the college should emphasize its relations with the community rather than linkages within the formal establishment);
>
> the integrated focus (a view of mission which gives attention to linkages within the college--such as across curricular areas--rather than to other colleges or to the community); and
>
> the remedial focus (a view of mission which would require community colleges to become "full service institutions to the young," helping them to become responsibility, productive citizens). (pp. 34-50)

Obviously, clarity of focus of the organization is required if performance expectations are to be specified. But clarity can, and must, be achieved at a local level, and it might include a decision to adhere to one of these foci or some combination of them, and it is within the clarified context that counseling should be asked to perform.

Once the focus of mission is clarified, the organizational standards must be specified. No doubt, these should be negotiated by local constituencies; however, we can seek some guidance from generalized sources. Allied authorities within the student personnel profession offer guidance. Matson and Deegan (1985), for example, or O'Banion, Leach, Noel and Levitz, and Elsner writing for Keyser (1985), or Thurston and Robbins (1983),

or Cohen and Brawer (1982), or Elsner and Ames writing for Vaughan (1983) offer--each in his or her own way--a view of the future of counseling. While these perspectives tend to take the traditional view of the profession, guidance from them is available on the organizational perspective.

Or we can look to organizational effectiveness literature and knowledge. Cameron (1981) is a reliable authority who suggests that at least the following domains of effectiveness are related to the achievement of organizational goals:

student educational satisfaction
student academic development
student career development
student personal development
faculty and administrator employment satisfaction
professional development and quality of faculty
system openness and community interaction
ability to acquire resources, and
organizational health.

Presumably, in Cameron's view, it is the sum of the outcomes of these domains which equals, or provides a reliable indicator of, organizational effectiveness.

Another view I have taken elsewhere, drawn, in part, from work of Astin (1985) and Argyris (1970), specifies certain conditions of the environment believed associated with the achievement of college goals and can be described as

characteristics of a potent learning environment (Creamer, in press):

students and faculty achieve their goals;

the environment is interactive; and

valid information is generated and free choice as to its use is encouraged.

These conditions can be translated into indicators of effectiveness. For example, "students and faculty achieve their goals" might translate into the following performance standards for the counseling unit:

Student and faculty goals are known;

Processes are operational to encourage personal introspection and goal setting;

Educational programs are achievement-oriented, require initial assessment of students, and require demonstration of competence for exit; and

Evidence of faculty development and goal achievement is presented at annual performance evaluations.

"The environment is interactive" might translate into the following performance standards for the counseling unit:

All educational activities employ active strategies for learner involvement;

Meaningful contacts are required between students and professional staff outside assigned duties as teachers, counselors, and administrators;

All professional staff model a member of a "community of scholars" and must be engaged in a personal program of research; and

All students participate in an individualized research project with a faculty advisor.

Selected performance standards for "valid information is generated and free choice regarding its use is encouraged" might include:

> Valid descriptive data on students, both individually and collectively, are generated;
>
> Valid descriptive data on the learning environment are generated;
>
> Processes are operational to analyze and interpret all data and to use them in educational decisions;
>
> All decision-oriented processes are based on principles of self-determination, whether student or faculty focused;
>
> Processes are operational to monitor student progress toward achievement of stated goals and to provide feedback to students routinely and reliably;
>
> Processes are operational to monitor faculty progress toward achievement of stated goals and to provide feedback to faculty routinely and reliably.

Notice that these are standards which address the entire organization, not only the counseling unit of the organization. The point of this perspective is to conceive of counseling activities <u>in a larger context</u> than as a single unit of the college. Counselors in this view make specific contributions to the entire organization and most of the counseling unit's activities would be defined in a context of <u>professional partnerships</u> rather than of <u>professional clinicians</u>. (Academic faculty might benefit from partnerships as much as counselors, for they, notorious in their singular orientation to their discipline, are not likely to hold to the larger context of

accomplishment within the institution any more than their counselor colleagues.) Such a view would not exclude person-to-person service which likely would remain a bulwark of individual professional activity, but it would give emphasis to the larger context as the reason for service, even if it is delivered in a one-to-one mode.

Certainly other performance standards than the ones listed above might be required of counseling, particularly as local contingencies are considered. These are suggested as illustrations of organizationally-oriented standards of performance and do not satisfy requirements either of comprehensiveness regarding total institutional needs for counselor interventions or specificity regarding activities of individual counselors. The comprehensiveness criterion should be applied by local institutional leaders; the specificity criterion should be determined by local counseling professionals.

Critics of this perspective will be quick to point to the vagueness of the standards in the form presented here. I acknowledge that condition and confess to some uncertainty regarding the best way to achieve greater specificity and/or clarity. Moving from the general to the specific, however, always is a task best performed by practicing professionals. Note, for example, the level of generality of the recommendations of the Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education in their report titled Involvement in Learning:

Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education (NIE, 1984). Necessarily, their recommendations are quite general, using such phrases as "should reallocate resources toward..., "make greater use of ...," "should be designed to...," and "should offer a systematics program of...." Practitioners must apply these recommendations in their own way. Likewise, we are gathered to consider ideas, to interpret meaning of the ideas for specific contexts, and to improve the ideas by collective deliberation. Generalities in thought need not describe the final product, but it seems more sensible to proceed from the general to the specific rather than vise versa.

Applications of the Organizational Effectiveness Perspective

Are there contexts more suitable than others for application of organizationally-oriented performance standards for counseling? I expect so. First, the organization must be one concerned about the elements of environmental potency described above. Other elements might be equally compelling, however, and might be refocused toward organizational goal achievement logic. Second, the standards described suggest cooperative effort across several units of the college. If, by contrast, an organization is heavily dependent on bureaucratic principles of operation, interdependent units may not be desirable. Third, the elements of environmental potency suggested above are premised on a belief that education is best achieved through processes which value

"the examined life." Introspection and self-determination are central to this value and if an organization operates on a different standard of value, the approach suggested above may not work.

The organization effectiveness approach to counseling should work best, it seems to me, in small colleges. Interdependency and personal goal achievement often characterize small colleges already, and the transition to counseling for the achievement of organizational goals should be comparatively easy. Of course, new procedures for individual counselor performance appraisal would be necessary.

Colleges with a significant commitment to general education also would seem likely prospects for this approach. The values of the organizational effectiveness perspective are consistent with the goals of liberal, or general, education in the sense that the system would be modified to encourage what general educators already strive to accomplish and would provide support through institution-wide systems.

The organizational effectiveness perspective seems appropriate to colleges with high levels of technology available, both in terms of professional know-how and of data management hardware. Professional know-how, however, is by far the most important of the two dimensions. Knowledge of research and evaluation procedures are essential. Knowledge of indirect service delivery systems is essential. Beyond these

requirements, many forms of information dissemination and systems management have equal attractiveness.

The approach suggested here should be an attractive option to college administrators faced either with a shortage of professional resources for counseling or with a belief that extant systems which do not produce visible products which allow their defense within an organizational context. This system represents an alternative for job enrichment, for reallocation of scare resources, for realigning professional assignments across professional subpopulations of the college, and for introducing a new system of management control over professional activities.

Counselor "burnout" is a term frequently associated with community college counseling and the reconfiguration of professional assignments suggested by the organizational effectiveness perspective should be an attractive option for counselors themselves. It may represent an opportunity for "outreach" which counselors often voice as a need and for more meaningful involvement in mainstream activities of the college often professed by counselors as "what they would do if given the chance."

Would it be necessary to reorganize counseling units to conform to the organizational effectiveness perspective? Probably. Counseling units might, for example, be restructured into "centers" of operation, each focused on a main purpose or set of objectives. These possibilities come to mind: (a) a

center for student assessment, (b) a center for environmental assessment, (c) a center for human development, (d) a center for student advising, (e) a center for career development, and (f) a center for student research. Centers, or course, would serve as a resource to the larger organization and may, or may not, provide direct service to students but always would provide leadership for cooperative ventures across organizational units.

Invitation to Dialogue

I have sketched four perspectives on community college counseling and suggested how these perspectives might shape the future of the profession. I attempted to translate one perspective--a comparatively foreign one to most counselors--into a general proposal for refocusing counselor activity in the community college to enable evaluation of its worth in terms of organizational effectiveness standards. Simply stated, counseling activities should be judged by their contribution to the achievement of goals of the college.

I appreciate the opportunity to share my ideas with you and invite your questions and comments about the proposal. Is it clear to you? Can you articulate the basic ideas in the proposal to others? Do you think you could implement the proposal given support from the president of your college? Do you believe the proposal, if implemented, would result in substantive differences in counselor performance?

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